
Gallery Review | Viewers will be 'blown away' by the complex versatility of screenprints in the Julie Chae Gallery's latest artistic exhibit

Katherine Zeis

Published: Thursday, April 10, 2008

Updated: Sunday, August 17, 2008

This month, the Julie Chae Gallery presents "BLOW ME AWAY: works on paper," a group show composed of five artists. The show introduces these very different artists, exploring the way they use the notion of fantasy and the medium of paper. With well over fifty pieces, the show is very complex. It demonstrates the versatility of this medium, both in terms of technique and style. The gallery continues its tradition of showcasing young artists: Brian Chippendale has been exhibiting since 1995, and the others (Christopher Davison, Nicole DePonte, Jungil Hong and Kevin Hooyman) all started after 2000.

The work is grouped by artist on the walls, starting with Brian Chippendale's silkscreen print collages. These pieces feature fantasy characters in brilliantly colored patterned landscapes. In "While Citizens Sleep," a person with a goat's head holds a gun while sitting in a boat on a pink lake with floating heads and flames. His works continue in this fashion with no apparent story that would link the various pieces.

On another wall of the gallery are Chippendale's silkscreen prints. His interest in comics is more evident here. These images are full of characters, some imaginary and some taken from pop culture, as in "Smurfin Mash-Up" and "We Have a Plan." The colors here are still brilliant, but there are fewer of them, and the printing process is seen more clearly. Most interestingly, Chippendale introduces the use of text. A social commentary is clear here, though it is not possible to understand the artist's whole message from the few works presented here.

Other works which feature fantastical characters are those of Kevin Hooyman. Showing the most intricate pieces in the show, Hooyman creates whole worlds out of only twenty to thirty works. Several of these are very small watercolor and ink portraits of Hooyman's characters, and they are beautiful and alluring despite their size. It is his larger pieces, though, that are most interesting.

"U.S.440 Scenic Restaurant" is enormous (22" x 30") for a pen and ink drawing, but Hooyman includes detail in every inch. The scene here is also imaginary: Strange animals flee a floating being which slightly resembles a monkey, trampling the jungle surrounding a restaurant where people watch in bewilderment. Even the smallest animals are drawn meticulously, down to the last strand of fur. Every leaf on every tree is shown in detail. Hooyman also includes text in some of his images, and like Chippendale, he leaves the viewer wanting to further explore his message.

Nicole DePonte focuses on landscapes as opposed to figures. Her large collages each feature a different space. Roller coasters, ladders and stairs are common features in her multi-leveled creations. She uses magazine clippings artfully, which blend seamlessly with her watercolor and ink paintings. Unlike Hooyman, she leaves much negative space in her images, which works to give her constructions a sense of monumentality and create the notion that they are floating.

Christopher Davison also makes ink drawings, but he combines them with wash, graphite and micron. His pieces are all black and white, and the creatures he creates are strange and almost creepy. In an image from his "End of Summer Series," a man lies on what looks like a hay pile. Plants grow out of his stomach and his eyes. His "Eight Witches Series" features equally violent and disturbing images.

In between Chippendale's groups of pieces is the work of Jungil Hong. She also creates silkscreen prints and screenprint collages. Here there are distinct similarities to Chippendale's work in that they also feature fantastical figures and abstracted landscapes. Her images, though, are more grounded and subdued. For example, she reuses many figures; some birds and some people occur in several of her pieces.

A rectangular format also is common to most of her works, perhaps a reference to the Korean playing cards, Hwa-toh,

which is the title of one of her pieces. "Hwa-toh" is a large piece with a low, silhouetted foreground. Among the black forms, one can discern what may be the outline of a house, but not much else. Large orange and red shapes resembling flames loom above this and occupy the majority of the image. The strength of this work lies in what is not told, leaving the viewer to ponder and look to find out more.

All of the artists in this show leave the viewer wanting more. It is not possible to fully explore any of their messages in so few pieces. The complexity of their work, however, is only brought out by their being placed in the same exhibit. The Julie Chae Gallery successfully demonstrates not only the possibilities available with an often-ignored medium, but it simultaneously uses these artists' work to bring out depth in all of the pieces. The gallery is also selling books by some of the artists, inviting further exploration of their work. The show is artfully curated and manages to introduce these very different artists without confusing the viewer.

College Publisher powered by mtvU and MTV Networks